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AUTHOR Anderson, Alice G.; Asselin, Susan B.

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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the level of 24 transition services and factors that affect service delivery for secondary students with disabilities in 135 Virginia school divisions. Transition services were categorized as inclusion, instructional programs, coordinated planning, and support services. Factors affecting delivery were cooperation of vocational and special education, administrative support, and formal interagency transition team. A mail survey was administered to 129 coordinators of transition services; 120 responded. Findings indicated that schools were upholding their responsibility to provide interaction of students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers. Instruction in independent living, social skills, career awareness, and job seeking skills was provided in over 90% of the school divisions. Over three-fourths of the school divisions had written agreements with other agencies. Adequate support services were provided, as shown by data indicating that guidance personnel were doing a sufficient job of assisting students with disabilities in career planning and decision making and in planning appropriate program placements while in school. Cooperation between vocational and special education occurred most frequently in placement, student monitoring, accommodations, and student evaluation. Measures of administrative support were relatively low. Only half of the school divisions reported formal interagency transition teams. (Five data tables and 30 references are appended.) (YLB)

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THE STATUS OF TRANSITION SERVICES FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIRGINIA AND FACTORS AFFECTING SERVICE DELIVERY

Dr. Alice G. Anderson
Assistant Professor
Radford University
Radford, VA

Dr. Susan B. Asselin
Associate Professor
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
Blacksburg, VA

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Special Needs Division
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INTRODUCTION

Despite national and state attention to transition issues, many students with disabilities continue to encounter difficulty in the transition process as they leave school (Berkell & Gaylord-Ross, 1989; Phelps, 1985; Ryan, 1988; West, 1988). However, barriers to productive adult living are not as much indigenous to the disabling condition as they are due to the fact that systematic preparation and planning for the transition from school to work and community adjustment are seldom done (Cameron, 1989). As one might expect, the literature reveals important components of service delivery are often lacking.

Therefore, this study investigates the level of transition services for secondary students with disabilities in Virginia school divisions and factors that affect service delivery. To provide the context of the study, transition services and factors are organized around four and three variables, respectively. Specifically, transition services are represented by the categories of: inclusion, instructional programs, coordinated planning and support services. Factors affecting the delivery of local transition services are organized around: cooperation of vocational and special education, administrative support and a formal interagency transition team.

Transition Services

The first category of transition services, inclusion of students with disabilities with nondisabled peers, is important because inclusion can better prepare students with disabilities to live, work and socially participate in the community (Halloran & Ward, 1988; Halpern, 1988; McDonnell & Hardman, 1985; Retish, 1989). Inclusion can occur in all aspects of education, including academic and vocational classrooms and across the general school environment. Implementation of procedures to remove attitudinal barriers and use of technology to increase opportunities for inclusion are also be components of inclusion initiatives.

Secondary level instructional programs, the second category of transition services, highlights functional academic areas encompassing independent living, successful articulation into the community, and appropriate postsecondary outcomes. Unfortunately, academic objectives are often emphasized in secondary special education at the expense of functional curricula (Brolin, 1989; Edgar, 1988; Elrod & Lyons, 1987; and Ianacone & Stodden, 1987). Further, even though on-the-job training could greatly enhance articulation into the community, such programs are seldom provided for students with disabilities (Hasazi et al., 1985 and Halpern,

1988). Likewise, postsecondary education is rarely included as a goal in transition plans (Halloran and Ward, 1988).

Coordinated planning services, the third area of consideration, focus upon coordination between parents, agencies, the community and the schools. Experience proves that much insight can be gained from participation of business, industry and community members regarding labor market and community integration issues (Maryland, 1988). With these representatives as allies, local transition planning groups can target resources available in the community and develop opportunities that otherwise may have never existed. Still, in a comprehensive study conducted in Oregon, only 6% of the schools had formal agreements with agencies and over half indicated that even informal agreements did not exist (Halpern, 1988).

The fourth category, support services, investigates both guidance services and vocational assessment. There is a lack of counseling and career planning services which target the special needs of students with disabilities (Okolo & Sitlington, 1988; Rusch & Phelps, 1987), despite the fact that vocational education legislation mandates services for special needs students be provided by professional counselors. In regard to vocational assessment, close interaction between assessment and prescription of vocational instruction enhances success of students with disabilities (Dick, 1985; Peterson & Peterson, 1986; Phelps & Greenan, 1982). It is often assumed that vocational educators can depend on the assistance of special educators, who are typically trained to interpret and apply assessment data, yet, many special education teachers are unable to justify instructional goals and objectives based on assessment results (Engelhard, 1982; Peters, Templeman and Brostrom, 1987)

Factors Affecting Transition Service Delivery

Three factors are assumed to be important in providing transition services, however, there exists little research to confirm this. The first factor, cooperation of vocational and special educators, is communicated as essential when students with disabilities are served in vocational classrooms (Brolin, 1983; Greenan, Miller, & White, 1985; Halloran & Ward, 1988; Halpern, 1985; Peterson, 1984;, Sarkees & Scott, 1986; Weisenstein & Elrod, 1987; West, 1988; Will, 1984). Joint planning and decision-making should occur regarding program placements, IEP development, accommodations and monitoring and evaluating student progress.

The second factor, administrative support for transition, is a common attribute of exemplary programs (Poole, Cook & deFur, 1987). Administrators indeed have the power to circumvent obstacles and maintain focus on benefits for students or to hinder development of certain programs and services (Asselin and Anderson, 1986). Important aspects of administrative support are evidenced through assignment of coordination duties, support for cooperation of vocational and special educators (Halpern, 1988), established local procedures (Maryland, 1988; West, 1988) and the provision of staff development (Asselin & Anderson, 1986; Halpern, 1988; McDonnell & Hardman, 1985; West, 1988).

The third factor, a formal interagency transition team to coordinate planning and services is essential to the process (McDonnell & Hardman, 1985; Halpern, 1988). Overall, collective efforts can enhance the quality of life for persons with disabilities as they face challenges of adult life.

To design and implement strategies for successful service delivery at the local level, it is important to gather baseline information. Therefore, this study investigated the degree to which specific transition services were provided and the existence of factors that affect delivery of transition services. Relationships between transition services and factors were also examined.

METHOD

Population

The population for this study consisted of persons in Virginia public school divisions who were designated as coordinators of transition services. A roster of coordinators was created by contacting superintendents in all 135 school divisions and requesting contact information for the appropriate person. A total of 129 transition coordinators were identified..

Instrumentation

The mail survey was developed from a review of literature on transition services. The instrument consisted of three parts. Part One presented items designed to measure the level of delivery of transition services across four categories: (a) inclusion, (b) instructional programs, (c) coordinated planning and (d) support services. Each category was delineated by a range of four to eight indicators. Part Two of the instrument targeted three factors that might affect delivery of transition services: (a) cooperation of vocational and special education, (b) administrative support, and (c) existence of a formal interagency team. The first two

of these factors were addressed through four and five indicators, respectively. Part Three of the instrument determined whether a formal interagency team was used by the school division.

For each of the services and factors categories participants circled the degree to which each indicator occurred in their school divisions on the scale of: always (3), usually (2), seldom (1) or never (0). Respondents selected a yes or no response when asked if school divisions participated in formal interagency planning teams. This was the only dichotomous variable in the study.

Pilot testing

The instrument was pilot tested with university faculty, members of the state's Transition Task Force and graduate students who worked in the field of transition. These individuals analyzed the questionnaire and made both written and verbal comments relative to the clarity of directions, appeal of the format, content of the questions, appropriateness of categorized items, and the method of response. Reviews also validated the categories of indicators and increased content validity.

Procedures

The survey was mailed to 129 identified transition coordinators. Two weeks after the initial request the response rate was 71% (n = 91). A reminder letter and another copy of the survey increased the response rate to 89% (n = 115). The final follow-up, conducted by phone, yielded a response rate of 93 percent (n = 120). This rate was deemed acceptable and data analysis began.

Method of Analysis

Resulting data encompassed three areas of analysis: (a) description of the level of specific transition services, (b) existence of specific factors affecting transition and (c) relational statistics. Transition services and factors affecting delivery contained a total of 33 indicators. Responses of always (3) or usually (2) were considered to denote that the service or factor existed in the school division. Responses of seldom (1) or never (0) were considered to indicate that the specific service was lacking. With this method of data interpretation intact, percentages of school divisions were derived.

For the third area of analysis two steps were implemented to analyze relational statistics. The first step was to collapse the specific indicators within the four categories of transition services and the two categories of factors into single measures representing each category. Intercorrelations were run on each of the four groups

of indicators which represented the transition service categories of inclusion, instructional programming, coordinated planning and support services. Likewise, intercorrelations were run on the two factors of cooperation of vocational and special education and administrative support for transition.

When an intercorrelation of items within a category was .30 or above, the degree of correlation was considered to be of adequate magnitude to retain the item within the category, because this accounted for at least 9% of the variance (Hinkle et al, 1979). This procedure increased the content validity for each category of services and factors. This resulted in nine of the twenty-four transition service indicators being excluded from the relational analysis due to an inadequate degree of intercorrelation. Further, one of the nine transition factor indicators was excluded. This methodology was followed in lieu of formal factor analysis prior to actual administration of the instrument for two reasons: (a) the population of 129 was not large enough to permit a factor analysis on the instrument and (b) because the survey solicited facts, not opinions.

Once indicators were collapsed into single measures each of the categories (4) of transition services were correlated with each of the factors (3). Pearson Product Moment Correlations were utilized to analyze the factors of administrative support for transition and cooperation of vocational and special education with each of the four transition service categories. Selection of this statistic was based on the fact that all data were considered continuous as responses fell on a continuum between three and zero. The yes or no responses to the third factor, existence of a formal interagency team, resulted in a dichotomous variable which was correlated with continuous variables; therefore, a Point Biserial Correlation was used. These statistics determined noteworthy relationships between the categories of transition services and the factors thought to affect delivery of transition services.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Status of Transition Services

Respondents indicated the degree to which 24 transition services were provided in 120 school divisions (see Table 1). Transition services are discussed by categories.

[Insert Table 1 here.]

Inclusion. Results reveal that schools are upholding their responsibility to promote interaction of students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers. Specifically in vocational education, a high percentage of

the school divisions reported inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes. Even though a high level of inclusion is reported in Virginia, procedures are seldom implemented to improve attitudes of nondisabled peers. This study confirms that students with disabilities are taught social skills, but little effort is put forth to decrease negative attitudes of their nondisabled peers. If attitudinal barriers were alleviated during the school years, the effect would likely extend throughout society as students left the schools and took adult roles.

Instructional services. Instruction in independent living, social skills, career awareness and job seeking skills is provided in over 90 percent of the school divisions. However, instruction is in leisure skills is provided in only 71 percent of the schools. Neglect in this area is unfortunate when nearly three fourths of the week of a full-time worker is unstructured and that percentage dramatically increases for the 50% to 80% of persons with disabilities are who are unemployed or underemployed.

In vocational education most school divisions not only mainstream students with disabilities, but they also provide individualized vocational instruction as needed. However, preparation for successful employment outcomes through the provision of on-the-job training experiences for secondary students with disabilities, appears to be a problem in Virginia as it is in other states (Hasazi et al., 1985; and Halpern, 1988). In addition, even though further education may be an appropriate option, almost one third of the school divisions provide no linkages from secondary education to further education.

Coordinated planning services. Over three-fourths of the school divisions in this study have written agreements with other agencies. This is better than expected in light of the finding of Pool et al. (1987) that written interagency agreements were used infrequently and inconsistently in Virginia. The high number of school divisions reporting interagency agreements in Virginia may be the result of efforts by the Department of Rehabilitative Services to formulate cooperative agreements with school divisions. However, we have no current data on the numbers of agencies participating in these agreements or how the agreements are used.

Even though coordination with other agencies is strong, the lowest rated of all transition services were those of inclusion of business and industry representatives, and community members in local transition planning initiatives. Unfortunately, some of the most important players are not included in the process. There is critical need for attention to these areas since employment and community participation are integral to productive adult living.

Support services. Data indicated that guidance personnel in Virginia are doing a sufficient job of assisting students with disabilities in career planning and decision-making and in planning appropriate program placements while in school. At the same time, many school divisions considered assessment in program placement decisions, but less than three-fourths based vocational curriculum and instruction on assessment data. Overall, adequate support services were provided.

Factors Affecting Delivery of Transition Services

Respondents indicated the degree to which nine specific factors existed at the local level. These data are detailed within the categories of cooperation of vocational and special education and support for transition (see Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 here.]

Cooperation between vocational and special education. In Virginia cooperation occurs most frequently in areas such as placement, student monitoring, accommodations and student evaluation. However, less than two-thirds of the respondents reported cooperation in writing goals and objectives in Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs), despite the report that 95 percent of the school divisions include students with disabilities in regular vocational education programs. Perhaps this indicates that individualized vocational programs are written with no input from the vocational teachers or that no vocational component is included in the IEP.

Support for transition. Regrettably, with the exception of one indicator, measures of administrative support in Virginia were relatively low (46% to 61%). The highest rated indicator was that of encouragement and support for cooperative planning between vocational and special education. Still, only half the school divisions reported that a person was assigned responsibility for such coordination. Less than half of the school divisions had transition coordination formally included as part of an administrators job description and less than ten percent of the time was allocated for this purpose.

Nearly half the school divisions lacked procedures to provide a continuum of services and coordination of planning. In addition, these schools did not provide inservice for personnel responsible for transition services. With this lack of support it can be predicted that many students would neither be appropriately prepared for the transition from school, nor be linked with appropriate supports upon school exit.

Formal interagency transition team. The literature addresses benefits of formal interagency transition teams, but only half the school divisions in Virginia report the presence of such teams. This may indicate not only a lack of commitment in schools, but also a lack of motivation of human service agencies to become involved in team situations. Teamwork in transition planning provides key personnel with a forum for learning how to pool resources and serve clients in the most effective manner.

Relationships Between Categories of Services and Factors

In the third phase of analysis, relationships were examined between four categories of transition services and three categories of factors affecting delivery of services. Causal relationships cannot be solely based upon correlational statistics, therefore, relationships are substantiated by existing literature. Discussion is organized around the three factors.

Cooperation between vocational and special education. Correlations ranged from .40 to .56 as the level of delivery of transition services was related to the factor of cooperation of vocational and special education. Overall, this factor had substantial positive correlations with all the categories of transition services. The highest correlation was with instructional programs, indicating that as cooperation of vocational and special education increases, so does the level of provision of functional instruction (see Table 3). The orientation of vocational education is to teach appropriate work behaviors, skills and ethics, while also integrating academic skills into the simulated or community-based work environment. Communication and cooperation help both special and vocational educators understand instructional needs of students with disabilities in independent living, functional academics, career related areas and preparation for employment through on-the-job training and work experience programs.

[Insert Table 3 here.]

The second highest relationship was with support services. Through cooperation with vocational educators it may be that special educators become more aware of the complexity of appropriate vocational choices. Then, as case managers, these teachers access vocational evaluation and guidance counseling services for their students. Further, the Carl D. Perkins legislation (U. S. Congress, 1990) mandates that students with disabilities be provided assessment and guidance and counseling services; therefore, students in vocational education may be more likely to access these services.

The third highest relationship was the degree of coordinated transition planning. Special education teachers often assume too much responsibility for the total program to the exclusion of others (Engelhard, 1982). At the same time, the nature of vocational education is to work with advisory councils and the employment community. By example, close involvement with vocational education can increase the special educators' awareness of the need to incorporate outside sources. Planning and preparing for the transition to educational, residential and vocational services prior to leaving school should be a shared responsibility.

The last relationship of noteworthy magnitude was with inclusion. The experience of inclusion in regular vocational education is similar to that which the students encounter as they participate in the mainstream of society. Peers are taught to work cooperatively and demonstrate appropriate attitudes. As vocational and special education teachers cooperate, vocational educators hopefully receive support and consultative services needed. Logically, when vocational educators feel supported and see the success of students with disabilities, they may welcome such students into their classrooms. In such instances, the level of inclusion would likely be greater.

Support for transition. Correlations ranged from .22 to .67 as the level of delivery of transition services was related to the factor of administrative support for transition. The highest correlations existed with coordinated transition planning, instructional programs and support services (see Table 4). For coordinated transition planning to occur, support of administrators must be strong. Bringing a number of agencies to the point of cooperation requires systematic plans for collaboration and allocation of staff time. Administrators who establish procedures to coordinate with agencies and families, are likely support direct involvement of parents in planning and implementation of services.

[Insert Table 4 here.]

The second highest association was with instructional programs. Supportive administrators assure that students with disabilities are provided the full range of educational programs to facilitate positive postsecondary outcomes. For administrators to be truly supportive of transition, they need to be vested in development of potential of students with disabilities to achieve total community integration.

The last meaningful relationship found for the factor of administrative support was with the category of support services. Vocational assessment and guidance and counseling are the foundations of transition services.

These supports are essential to ensure appropriate directions for individuals with disabilities as they prepare for community participation. Current legislation assures that instruction is be based on assessment and that guidance and counseling will be provided by professional counselors (U. S. Congress, 1990).

Formal interagency transition team. Correlation coefficients ranged from .04 to .47 as the factor of existence of a formal interagency transition team was related to the level of delivery of transition services. A noteworthy correlation was with coordinated transition planning (see Table 5). This would be expected due to the fact that a team may be the procedure implemented to provide coordinated planning.

[Insert Table 5 here.]

This data might be more meaningful if it had determined who served on the team, activities of the team, the numbers of students served by the team. Some of the existing teams in Virginia serve very limited numbers of students who meet specific criteria, while others may serve all the special education students who need interagency planning in a given school division. Also, some teams only access the Department of Rehabilitative Services while others may access as many as thirteen human service providers. Such differences in the teams might affect the magnitudes of correlations with transition services.

Another element that may have affected the magnitude of the correlations between the factor of a team and the categories of transition services was the dichotomous nature of this variable. This may have lessened the strength of the team variable as compared to the others, each of which were formulated through several indicators. Were the above considerations taken into account this variable would have been measured more comprehensively.

IMPLICATIONS

Administrative support for transition at the local level is a critical need. To increase the level of transition services provided in a locality, it is essential that administrators provide procedures for a continuum of services and for coordinated planning across the school, agencies and the family. Further, even though it was reported in this study that cooperation is encouraged between special and vocational education, staff time is often not allocated for someone to coordinate cooperative efforts. It was also discovered that few administrators provide inservice which would increase the competence of personnel responsible for transition planning and preparation.

It is also evident that cooperation between vocational and special education enhances the level of transition services provided secondary students with disabilities. Special educators should cooperate with all regular educators, but perspectives from vocational education are rather unique. Vocational educators possess abilities and resources to identify specific occupational competencies, assist students in developing appropriate work behaviors, teach through hands-on experiences and develop work experiences and job placements within the community. Special educators on the other hand, offer expertise in behavioral management, application of assessment to instructional planning, learning styles and adaptations of curriculum and instruction. Coordination of these two disciplines is a key to preparing students with disabilities for successful transitions to community living.

Finally, a formal interagency transition team increases the level of coordinated transition planning for individuals. A formalized team approach brings together agency representatives and allows the pooling of resources. Planning and implementation strategies can be designed by the family, the school and human service representatives to ensure success as students with disabilities transition to the adult community.

Table 1

Percentages of Virginia School Divisions Reporting Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

Integration Services	%
Across the general school environment	99
In academic classrooms	96
In vocational education classrooms	95
Technology implemented to increase integration	80
Procedures implemented to improve peer attitudes	69

Instructional Services	%
Independent living skills	93
Social skills	92
Career awareness	92
Job seeking/keeping skills	90
Individualized vocational education	84
Leisure skills	71
Linkage to employment/further education prior to school exit	71
On-the-job training	63

Table 1. Continued.

Coordinated Planning Services	%
Parents review and evaluate their children's programs	96
Parents informed of resources and agencies	92
Parents directly involved in planning and implementing transition services	82
Written interagency agreements	78
Systematic planning strategies for service referral	74
Business & industry involved in planning	29
Community representative involved in planning	29

Support Services	%
Vocational assessment considered in program placement	85
Guidance assists students in career planning	84
Guidance assists in program placement decisions	82
Curriculum and instruction based on vocational assessment data	73

n = 120

Table 2

Percentages of Virginia School Divisions Reporting Factors Affecting Delivery of Transition Services

Cooperation of Vocational and Special Education	%
Accommodating students in vocational education programs	87
Monitoring and evaluating progress of students	82
Making program placement decisions with students	77
Writing vocational goals and objectives on IEP	65
Administrative Support for Transition	**%**
Cooperative planning encouraged between vocational and special education	92
Procedures provide a continuum of services including assessment, appropriate programs, individualized planning, and support services	61
Procedures for coordination of planning between school, family, and human service agencies	60
A person is assigned responsibility for coordination of vocational and special education	52
Inservice provided personnel responsible for transition services	46

n = 120

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients for Cooperation of Vocational and Special Education and Transition Services

Transition Service Categories	r
1. integration with nondisabled peers	.40
2. instructional programs	.56
3. coordinated transition planning	.42
4. support services provided	.52

n = 120

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients for the factor of Administrative Support for Transition and Transition Services

Transition Service Categories	r
1. integration with nondisabled peers	.22
2. instructional programs	.63
3. coordinated transition planning	.67
4. support services provided	.52

n = 120

Table 5

Correlation Coefficients for the Factor of Formal Inter-agency Transition Planning Teams and Transition Services

Transition Service Categories	r_{pb}
1. integration with nondisabled peers	.04
2. instructional programs	.18
3 coordinated transition planning	.47
4. support services provided	.19

n = 120

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